

CRISIS AMERICA

Trump's militias say they are armed and ready to defend their freedoms

Further violence, and even civil war, is threatened in the final days of the presidency

Laura Pullman, Washington

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Wednesday's storming of the Capitol was a 'warning shot', said one participant
SAUL LOEB

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The storming of the Capitol by a ragtag bunch of white nationalists, self-styled militia men and die-hard Donald Trump supporters was a tremor before a bigger earthquake, claimed geed-up protestors in the wake of the rampage.

"This demonstration was a warning shot from we the people," said Jay Perez, who had travelled from New York City for the "stop the steal" march in Washington last Wednesday.

"It shows that people are awakening, they're ready to defend America no matter what the deep state of this country or the world order puppets want. This is World War Three."

Last Thursday morning, as metal fencing was hastily erected around the Capitol and pressured police hunted the perpetrators, conspiracy theorists and fired-up right-wing fanatics from across the country discussed their "last chance to save America" in the shadow of the Washington Monument. Many pledged to return for another pro-Trump march scheduled to coincide with Joe Biden's inauguration on January 20, which [Trump himself has now vowed to avoid](#).

"We wanted to show that we're willing to rise up, band together and fight if necessary. Same as our forefathers, who established this country in 1776," said

Eric Munchel, who had driven from Nashville, Tennessee, with his mother, Lisa Eisenhart.

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The pair were among the crowd who flooded the Capitol the previous afternoon but claimed that they left as soon as demonstrators talked about stealing laptops and government papers. Eisenhart stressed to me that they had gone into the building as “observers” – both wore bulletproof vests — and that her son had told her not to touch anything.

However, Twitter sleuths quickly worked to determine that it was Munchel who was caught on camera leaping over railings in the senate chamber in full paramilitary gear – in a photograph that quickly went viral.

During our conversation, as they packed their car the following day to go home, Munchel claimed that he had left his guns behind in Tennessee due to strict gun laws in Washington but, unsurprisingly, didn’t mention that he had been clutching a handful of plastic zip ties while storming the Capitol. These are the restraints typically used by police to detain individuals, and it’s unclear what Munchel’s intention was with them. The photograph led to speculation that the rioters were potentially planning to take hostages. The riot left five people, including a police officer, dead.

“It was a kind of flexing of muscles,” said Munchel, who wore a bulletproof vest and complained that police confiscated his Taser during the riot. “The intentions of going in were not to fight the police. The point of getting inside the building is to show them that we can, and we will.”

Preparing for their 10-hour drive home, the 30-year-old clamoured for greater organisation in the next steps to fight against Biden’s America. He worried that many pro-Trump warriors were individualists and lamented that potential leaders in the Make America Great Again (Maga) movement faced difficulty in rallying troops due to [banishment from mainstream social media sites](#). “Our biggest struggle is getting together, knowing where to go, what to do and who to go to,” said Munchel despondently.

His mother agreed: “The left has everything: the media, organisations, the government. We have to organise if we’re going to fight back and be heard.” Eisenhart, a nurse, added that a violent revolution has long been on the cards thanks to last year’s racial justice protests, anti-police riots and “unnecessary” coronavirus lockdowns.

“This country was founded on revolution. If they’re going to take every legitimate means from us, and we can’t even express ourselves on the internet, we won’t even be able to speak freely, what is America for?” said a teary-eyed Eisenhart, biting into a hotdog. “I’d rather die as a 57-year-old woman than live under oppression. I’d rather die and would rather fight.”

Political commentators fear that the riot, as well as Republicans distancing themselves from Trump, will have emboldened the MAGA movement into further action. Activists have begun promoting an armed march on Capitol Hill and “all state capitols” on January 17.



Activists have begun promoting an armed march on Capitol Hill on January 17
STEPHANIE KEITH

“Over two hundred years ago, our founding fathers fought for the rights and liberties of this nation. Don’t let their efforts be in vain. Demand freedom. End the corruption,” reads the poster. The small print suggests attendees “come armed at your personal discretion”.

Meanwhile, other Trump loyalists last week were claiming, without evidence, that left-wing antifa (anti-fascist) hooligans had purposefully disguised themselves in Trump merchandise before violently overrunning the Capitol.

“Antifa stormed the Capitol to make us look bad and it just pisses me off,” said Londa Gatt, a member of Bikers for Trump who had travelled from Michigan and was puzzlingly optimistic that Biden, 78, would not be taking power later this month.

“The hopes, and what I feel in my heart, is that the military is going to arrest these all traitors that committed treason and that Trump is going to take office,” she said. “I’m not even one bit concerned.”

By Thursday evening, facing international criticism and suffering mounting resignations, [Trump finally condemned the attack](#) on the “seat of American democracy” in a video posted on Twitter. For critics, it was a hollow “hostage” video that he was forced to make in a bid to avoid a second impeachment. For some staunch supporters, however, it was a staggering betrayal.

“Wow, what an absolute punch in the gut,” read one post on TheDonald, a forum where the president’s devotees have plotted how to keep their man in power. “He says it’s going to be wild, and when it gets wild, he calls it a heinous attack and middle-fingers his supporters that he told to be there. Unbelievable.”

“People were willing to die for this man and he just threw them all under the bus. That’s the only thing that’s shameful about the events of the past 36 hours,” Nicholas Fuentes, a far-right commentator, wrote to his 133,347 followers on Twitter. “I’m sure the usual suspects suggested that this was a good idea, I hope Trump reverses course, for our sake.”

More troubling is the fervent Maga fanbase plotting to return to Washington for Biden’s swearing-in. In dark corners of the web, militants are promoting the “Million Militia March”.



One Capitol invader carried plastic zip ties, suggesting a plan to take hostages

Many loitering outside the Capitol last week viewed this as an exciting prospect. “Either they give up the fraudulent election they had or America mobilises,” said Travis Wright, who drove 24 hours from Denver, Colorado, to protest last week. “I’ll be here for [the inauguration] one way or the other, whether it’s to see my president, 45th president Donald J Trump, take that stand, or whether it’s to stand against the fake Joe Biden.”

Wright, who sells knives and axes for a living, talked about burning America down “to build it back better”, and predicted further violence. “You’ll finally see the Trump supporters truly take a stand and take it to the streets. People want to sit there and call riots therapeutic for Black Lives Matter and antifa. We’ll start calling it therapeutic for us because it’ll be us getting our anger out at that point.”

Some Trump supporters expressed fear about the prospect of a “civil war where you’re shooting your brothers, your family”, while others just seemed excited at the idea of more violent uprisings.

“January 20 should be interesting. Let’s see what happens, but it will be more history, I guess,” said a man with a tattoo of a knuckle duster and a symbol of 3%, which relates to a militia group named after the disputed claim that only 3% of American colonists took up arms against Great Britain in the American War of Independence.

As the final countdown to a new presidency begins, [investigators scrambled to track down the Capitol raiders](#), many of whom quickly escaped Washington on Thursday. Prominent among them was Jake Angeli, an Arizonian who calls

himself Yellowstone Wolf and champions QAnon, a conspiracy theory that a paedophile cult runs a deep-state plot. Extraordinary photographs of Angeli, bare-chested, heavily tattooed and wearing a fur hat with buffalo horns as he broke into the Capitol, quickly spread across the world.

“The fact that we had a bunch of our traitors in office hunker down, put on their gas masks and retreat into their underground bunker, I consider that a win,” Angeli, 32, told NBC News as he fled Washington by car on Thursday.

The police are also seeking Jon Schaffer, a guitarist with Iced Earth, a successful rock band, who was photographed inside the government building. Others were pictured carrying the Confederate flag and wearing clothing with horrifying antisemitic messages.

As darkness fell over the Capitol on Thursday, one young self-described “patriot” painted a dismal picture of Biden’s America: “In a year, we’re not going to be able to buy our own bread, we won’t be able to afford gas for our cars. Our country is going in the hole real fast.”



Investigators are now scrambling to track down the Capitol invaders
JIM LO SCALZO

He hoped for a “true insurgent” to “take out” Biden. “I don’t believe he’s our president. He’s not my president and he definitely won fraudulently,” he said, standing beside a stall selling “Stop the steal” baseball caps.

For Bobby, a property developer who travelled from Indiana with his wife and six children for the pro-Trump march, the seizing of the Capitol was the beginning of an uprising. “It’s going to take a shaking to wake up people, you know; yesterday at the Capitol, that there was a small tremor,” he said. “If we were to go into a war situation, I could protect my children more in that aspect than I can from letting their beliefs be threatened by our school systems and by our government.”

He added that he was willing to die to “protect his freedoms — if you don’t have that mentality that you’re willing to give up your life for what you believe in, then get the hell out of here”, he said.

Extremism experts have cautioned about a rise in violent clashes in Washington between Trump loyalists and right-wing groups, such as the Proud Boys, and left-wing agitators.

“In the case of the Million Militia March these groups, who have agendas to create disruption, will piggyback and try to create a big tent to bring in as many protesters as possible, and they tend not to be terribly picky about who joins the party. Clearly, that’s a concern,” said Jonathan Vick, the North American representative from the International Network Against Cyber Hate, which campaigns against extremism online.

Last week’s fatal riot will likely add momentum for further attacks, warned Vick: “We’re already seeing that the people who, unfortunately, were killed are now being cast as martyrs, and so that is absolutely fuel for additional violence and additional actions by people looking for an excuse.”

Other Trump “patriots” were underwhelmed by the president’s speech last Wednesday and vowed not to return to Washington to fight his corner again.

“It wasn’t anything groundbreaking like he was promising,” said a young woman waiting for her train home to New Jersey. “I’d hoped he’d walk us through the next steps more, but he just went over the fraud again and we already knew all that.”

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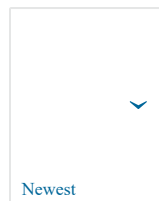
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